

DELIVERING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

CURRENT ISSUES FOR OUTCOME-FOCUSSED
PRACTICE IN YOUTH WORK

FULL REPORT

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The views expressed in this report are those of the consultants and do not necessarily represent those of the Lifelong Learning Directorate, or Scottish Ministers.

DELIVERING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: CURRENT ISSUES FOR OUTCOME-FOCUSED PRACTICE IN YOUTH WORK

Learning Connections is part of the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government. It carries responsibility for supporting the development and implementation of policy and practice in relation to Community Learning and Development (CLD).

This report is one of three separate reports written as part of the outcome-focused practice support programme funded by the Scottish Government and delivered to Community Learning and Development Partnerships (CLDPs) from November 2007 to May 2008. The support programme was instigated by Learning Connections in the recognition that, against a backdrop of a national context for outcome-based practice, some CLDPs still face challenges in embedding an outcomes focus into their work and that effective outcome-focused practice in CLD is inconsistent across Scotland.

The programme was delivered by a consortium of YouthLink Scotland, Linked Work And Training Trust (LWTT) and Avanté Consulting, led by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC).

The reports concentrate on each of the three national priorities for community learning and development – achievement through learning for adults, achievement through learning for young people and achievement through building community capacity. Each report sets out the current context for each area of work, the key challenges and issues facing strategists, managers and practitioners and recommendations for developing effective outcome-focused practice.

The content of the reports reflects the dialogue between participants at the workshops held throughout the support programme as part of the regional seminars and as part of the local support programme. The recommendations contain some additional reflective commentary by the support agencies – the Scottish Community Development Centre, YouthLink Scotland, Linked Work and Training Trust and Avanté Consulting.

The reports are intended to be used by strategic managers and champions of CLD to reflect on practice, facilitate continued dialogue at a local level and to develop a strategic approach to supporting outcome-focused practice in CLD.

Current Climate/Context

Developments over recent years have enhanced the opportunities for the Youth Work sector to engage in, and contribute to the delivery of a number of national priority areas.

In January 2004 the Scottish Executive published *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* the policy guidance for Community Learning and Development.

The guidance sets the three national priorities developed for community learning and development which includes: *Achievement through learning for young people*: Engaging with young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence and a place in society.

In 2007 the Scottish Executive launched *Moving Forward*, the National Youth Work Strategy. The Strategy articulates the importance of Youth Work's contribution to wider policy agendas, such as *A Curriculum for Excellence*, *Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)* and *More Choices, More Chances* in ensuring the achievement of young people.

Moving Forward identifies the need to provide the Youth Work sector with advice and training on self-evaluation. 'a significant number of respondents indicated they would welcome more support with self-evaluation and identifying and measuring outcomes and impacts.'

Skills for Scotland: a lifelong strategy (2007); reinforces the importance of Youth Work's contribution through equipping Scotland's young people with the skills, expertise and knowledge necessary to build a wealthier, fairer, healthier, safer, stronger and greener Scotland. The strategy also emphasises the cost of failure, with young people not in education, employment or training.

In February 2008 the Scottish Government and COSLA established a Concordat setting out the terms of a new relationship between local authorities and Scottish Government. A central proposal was the creation of a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) between each Council and the Scottish Government, based on 15 key national outcomes agreed in the Concordat. The national outcomes reflect the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework. One of the 15 national outcomes is 'Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.' This outcome relates directly to young people and presents an opportunity for developing youth work outcomes in response.

Definitions

In 2004 YouthLink Scotland consulted widely with the sector to develop an agreed *Statement on the nature and purpose of Youth Work*. The document received widespread support across the Youth Work sector and clearly states that:

Youth Work plays a key role in delivering the principles outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, the right of the young person to voice their opinion, have their views listened to and be taken seriously. By engaging young people in social activism, Youth Work builds citizenship, respect for human rights and a sense of mutual responsibility.

Youth Work is an educational practice contributing to young people's learning and development. Youth Work engages with young people within their communities; it acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture; it supports the young person to realise their potential and to address life's challenges critically and creatively; it takes account of all strands of diversity.

Youth Work takes place in a variety of settings including community venues, uniformed groups, schools, youth cafés and on the street, whilst using numerous approaches such as outdoor pursuits, drama workshops, health initiatives, peer education and single issue and single gender work to engage with young people.

The effectiveness of Youth Work methods has led to an increasing number of organisations developing Youth Work approaches, for example those working in youth justice and health improvement programmes. This demonstrates the range of ways Youth Work can be applied, enabling young people who might otherwise be alienated from support to get the services they need. The Youth Work sector welcomes these developments and seeks to co-operate with those who contribute to young people's social and personal development.

However, there remains a fundamental need for community based Youth Work which has been eroded as a service in recent years, at a time when young people are under greater pressure than ever, especially the most disadvantaged.

The purpose of Youth Work was well defined in *Step it Up*, following extensive discussion and consultation with the Youth Work sector, and is as follows:

- Build self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Develop the ability to manage personal and social relationships.
- Create learning and develop new skills.
- Encourage positive group atmospheres.
- Build the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.
- Develop a 'world view' which widens horizons and invites social commitment.

Youth Work has three essential and definitive features:

Young people choose to participate:

The young person takes part voluntarily. She/he chooses to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends and have fun. The young person decides whether to engage or to walk away.

The work must build from where young people are:

Youth Work operates on young people's own personal and recreational territory within both their geographic and interest communities. The young person's life experience is respected and forms the basis for shaping the agenda in negotiation with peers and Youth Workers.

Youth Work recognises the young person and the Youth Worker as partners in a learning process:

The young person is recognised as an active partner who can, and should, have opportunities and resources to shape their lives. The relationship and dialogue between the young person and Youth Worker is central to the learning process.

The characteristics and purpose detailed define Youth Work. Youth Work is an empowering process. Youth Work is thus one of the very few practices whose remit provides for young people to exercise genuine power – to take decisions, follow them through and take responsibility for their consequences. Youth Work seeks to tip the balance of power in young people's favour.

Cross Cutting Issues

Although there are some policy and practice issues pertinent only to community capacity building, youth work and adult learning it was evident that there are some issues which cut across all three themes.

Confusion about terminology and ability to measure outcomes

Participants felt that there is now an 'outcome industry' (not just within CLD) which is making outcome-focused practice more complicated and confusing than necessary. Outcomes/outputs/milestones/impact: just some of the myriad of terms which are often used interchangeably but with different meanings in different contexts. A lack of consistency is apparent in how outcomes are measured. This is partly due to a range of stakeholders such as HMLe, CLD Partnerships and funders asking for different information.

Working within an 'output' culture

Within the majority of organisations there is still a culture of focussing on outputs and not outcomes. Many staff are working to output driven work plans through the process of Best Value Reviews and are under pressure from elected members for quantifiable results.

Capacity

The issue of capacity was raised frequently – capacity in terms of numbers of staff and capacity in terms of skills and resources. It was noted that pre and post qualifying training does not equip CLD staff to enter into practice with a developed understanding and/or ability to engage in outcome-focused practice. The make-up of the Youth Work profession being mostly volunteers and sessional staff at delivery level, makes outcome-focused practice a particular challenge. Within the theme of capacity building it was highlighted that there is a need to 'Build the capacity of the capacity builders'.

Working within new national and local outcomes frameworks

Participants generally welcomed the establishment of the national performance framework and the Concordat between Scottish Government and local authorities and viewed this as positive for CLD in terms of being able to identify and set strategic local outcomes more effectively. Community Capacity Builders, Youth Workers and Adult Literacy and Numeracy practitioners could identify clear links to one or more of the national outcomes but Community Based Adult Learning (CBAL) staff were concerned that CBAL did not fit directly with any of the 15 national outcomes. It was agreed that CLDPs should continue to work strategically as key members of Community Planning Partnerships, promoting the place of CLD outcomes as key elements of community planning and contributors to single outcome agreements.

The core values of CLD

It was highlighted throughout the support programme that CLDPs should ensure that the focus, conduct and outcomes of CLD are developed in a manner that is compatible with its core values, in particular its commitment to equalities and social justice.

Youth Work

The issues pertinent to the theme of youth work are:

Measuring success against the intentional and unintentional outcomes

Youth Workers highlighted that the young people they work with can often lead chaotic lives. Although intentional outcomes can be agreed at the start of a project or intervention the nature of work with young people often requires the youth worker to be flexible and able to adapt to the changing needs of the young person. This can result in the original intended outcomes being superseded by a range of unintentional outcomes. This does not diminish the value of the actual outcomes as these can be very positive but does present difficulties in reporting back on the initial project plans and proposals.

The Youth Work sector also identified a potential conflict between the Community Learning and Development values of *Empowerment, Participation* and *Self-determination* and the national outcomes.

'The starting point must always be the needs of the young people, this can at times be at odds with the 'Strategic outcomes' set by partnerships. How do we work with young people to ensure they have ownership of the process? Not all of the adult partners buy into the Youth Work approach and value base – outcomes can become adult led.'

It should not be forgotten that Youth Work often supports young people to challenge leaders and decision makers; the outcomes that young people want or expect are not always going to sit comfortably with decision makers.

Youth Work practitioners also identified that due to the nature of their work with young people; group work, street work, short term interventions etc., they have difficulty in establishing accurate baseline information on individuals. This makes it harder to set accurate and realistic targets and outcomes.

Meeting the expectations of stakeholders

Youth Workers expressed some concern that within the majority of organisations there is still a culture of focussing on outputs and not outcomes. Many staff are working to output driven work plans through the process of Best Value Reviews, and under pressure from elected members for quantifiable results. The same culture is also inherent in practitioners; including those newly qualified. Where target setting and number crunching is the priority, there presents a difficulty in focussing on the qualitative outcome approach with young people.

It was also highlighted that Youth Work can be pulled in different directions to meet the needs of the community, politicians and police e.g. Community Safety. The question is how can Youth Work accommodate a flexible approach to outcome-focused practice but maintain robustness.

The political pressure and attention on young people, both local and national, can lead to a perpetual shifting of outcomes for Youth Work. This in turn can lead to a particular focus on delivering quick-win outputs rather than a focus on longer-term outcomes.

'It is not important at local government level. There is a gap between national and local. Local politicians don't care about outcomes; they are interested in who's hanging about the street.'

There is also an issue that within Youth Work there is an over-reliance on continually changing external funding for projects. This stretches partners and leads to a mesh of outcomes being delivered which are not always the important ones for the young people involved.

A lack of consistency is apparent in how we measure outcomes across the board (not just CLD). This is partly due to a range of stakeholders such as HMLe, CLD Partnerships and funders asking for different information. This lack of consistency in how we measure can also mean duplication of effort and consultation fatigue among service users. A key issue for staff was in understanding how their current way of measuring and evaluating their work at grassroots level fitted with the bigger picture.

The sector recognises there are compatibility issues between different systems of reporting and also what is recorded. Participants, practitioners, and managers/strategists all have different outcomes and we need to ensure that these are compatible. One of the more general suggestions which emerged was the need to support staff by introducing a more streamlined tool for recording how outcomes were being met.

Volume of participants and nature of engagement

Youth Work more so than the other priority areas of Community Learning and Development works with a very fluid client group, and there is a constant turn over of young people engaging in Youth Work provision. In addition the nature of Youth Work can range from longer term engagement, to short term projects to very time limited street work interventions.

In addition, the volume of young people involved in mainstream Youth Work puts significant pressure on part time staff and volunteers who deliver the bulk of face-to-face contact. Often resources are not directed at their training and development around recording outcomes, and they have limited time to fit this in. Full time staff have more time but they often face the pressure of balancing the development of sessional staff and volunteers against direct delivery.

Workforce Issues

The make-up of the Youth Work profession being mostly volunteers and sessional staff at delivery level makes outcome-focused practice a particular challenge. Loose contractual arrangements with volunteers and limited opportunity and capacity for training (both budget and time) can make it difficult to insist on training in outcome based practice. Usually training covers the bare essentials such as child protection.

A lack of capacity and need for training was evident particularly from the voluntary youth sector where resources are stretched. However the issue also extends to local authority staff.

Youth Work managers and practitioners believed that there was not enough linking between staff at strategic, operational and delivery levels to ensure that outcome-focused practice occurs. Full time staff have the opportunity for development planning, but part-time staff and volunteers often don't have the same time. Support and supervision from full-time staff enabling staff at delivery level to reflect on outcomes is not occurring enough.

Concern about lack of Youth Work input in the development of the Single Outcome Agreements

The Youth Work sector recognised the need to ensure that they were ready to have a more significant role in the development of the next Single Outcome Agreements. Community Learning and Development service plan targets have in places been included in the Single Outcome Agreements but there was little opportunity for consultation with the youth work practitioners or the young people they work with.

Confusion about terminology;

Participants felt that there is now an 'outcome industry' (not just within CLD) which is making outcome-focused practice more complicated and confusing than necessary. Outcomes/outputs/milestones/impact: just some of the myriad of terms which are often used interchangeably but with different meanings in different contexts. This issue was reinforced in a number of practical group exercises where participants confused the use of outcomes and outputs.

'We need a simple booklet with the recommended systems to use that can be accessible to all staff members; sessional and part-time workers; and more training on these systems so that everyone understands the terminology and the purpose.'

Responding to the Issues

This final section highlights some of the key messages that come from the discussions. The responsibility for responding to the issues lies with strategists and managers at both national and local levels.

Recommended Actions for Community Learning & Development Partnerships

CLDPs should continue to work strategically as a member of the Community Planning Partnership to ensure that Youth Work outcomes are recognised as key contributors to Single Outcome Agreements.

CLDPs should develop CLD plans which reflect a greater emphasis on qualitative outcomes for Youth Work and young people.

Recommended Actions for Community Learning & Development Managers

CLD Managers should invest in the training, development and on going support that enables Youth Work practitioners, particularly volunteers, part-time and sessional staff to become familiar with and put into practice support tools such as 'LEAP' and 'Delivering Change'.

CLD Managers should demonstrate a commitment to outcome-focused culture by building in the necessary time and resources within the planning and evaluation processes.

CLD Managers should engage in dialogue with elected members to ensure an understanding and commitment to the Youth Work approach in supporting young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Recommended Actions for Policy Makers

Youth workers and managers recognised that there are national drivers helping to set the outcomes agenda and ensure Youth Work's contribution to achieving shared outcomes is evidenced including the *National Youth Work Strategy*, *Volunteer Action Plan*, *Skills for Scotland Report* and *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

Policy makers should ensure that young people are appropriately involved in the process of developing policies that impact on their lives thus ensuring that the desired outcomes meet the needs of all stakeholders, including the young people themselves.

Recommended Actions for other stakeholders

Funding bodies, whether government or charitable trusts, should consider longer term sustainable funding packages which allow projects to plan for long term outcomes that meet the needs of participants and are not determined by short term funding priorities.

Investors, inspectors and decision makers should work collaboratively to reduce duplication of effort for practitioners; streamlining systems for measuring recording and reporting on outcomes.

Further Information on the support programme

The support programme took the form of six regional events with an allocation of places for each CLDP weighted according to the size of the partnership area. The events were followed up with the offer of an allocation of support days for each area.

The outcomes of the support programme were identified as follows:

To have identified and supported influential champions of outcome-focussed practice.

To have established shared understanding of the dimension of the issues to be tackled.

To have established connections between champions that will enable those people to continue to network with one another and promote learning exchange.

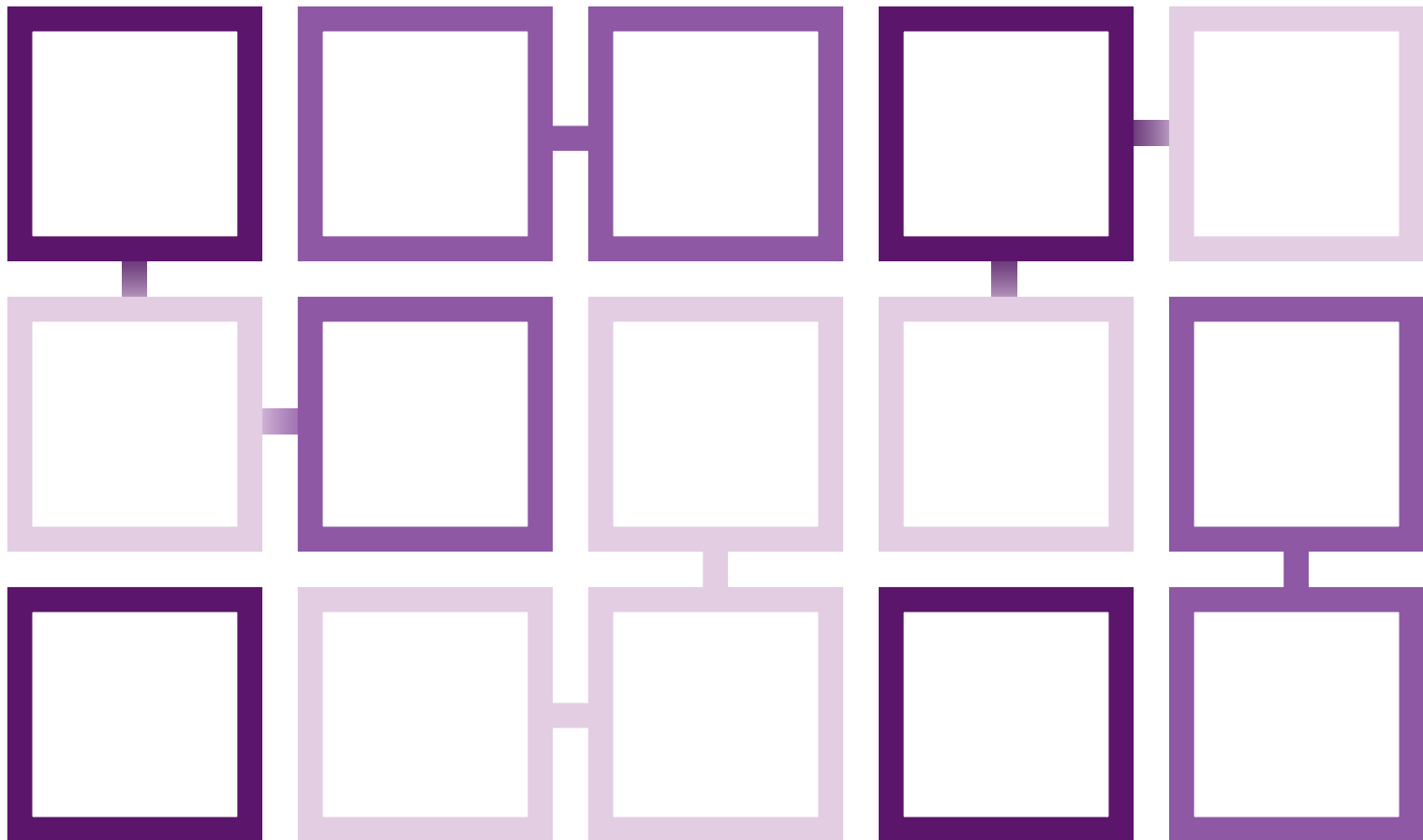
Where local actions are already being undertaken, to have added value to these initiatives by supporting critical reflection and providing further ideas and information.

Where local actions are not being taken to have motivated commitment to a process of local activity that seeks to enhance understanding and competence.

It was acknowledged that the factors underlying the need for a support programme present challenges that require to be addressed over a longer timescale and that the support programme for 2007/8 would establish a baseline for further development.

The focus for the regional seminars was not to deal directly with the issues affecting outcome-focussed practice but to engage in dialogue about the dimensions of the issues and how they might best be tackled with key leaders and practitioners.

The follow up support provided the opportunity to address the issues on a practical level by providing training and facilitated discussion.



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